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## DR. RAJAH SIR MUTHIAH CHETTIAR AS A LEGISLATOR

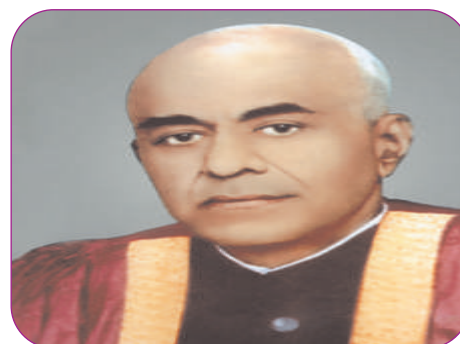
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### ABSTRACT :

So many people enter legislature but only a few distinguish themselves as skilful debaters and legislator. RaJah Sir Muthiah Chettiar was one among such a few distinguished celebrities. He first into active politics was when he contested the election to the Madras Corporation. He was the first Mayor of madras. His career in legislature started at the age of 26 to till 1984. He was legislator and minister and opposition leader.



**KEYWORDS :** Assiduous, Unanimously, Factionalism, Debate.

### INTRODUCTION

So many people enter legislature but only a few distinguish themselves as skilful debaters and legislators. Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar was one among such a few distinguished celebrities. His first into active politics was when he contested the election to the madras Corporation council in 1929. His father was responsible for his grooming from his childhood to adult hood. His family background gave him an opportunity to have contacts with many political personalities, social leaders, religious heads, administrators, intellectuals etc. After his graduation he involved himself in public life. His father also welcomed it. As a young man he also showed interest in social reform movement. The leaders of Madras Presidency like Sir Pitty Theagaraya Chetti, the Rajah of Panagal, Dr.T.M. Nair, Sir Mohammed Usman, the Rajah of Bobbili and Mr.P.T. Rajan organized the party known as Justice Party. This party fought for the rights of Non – Brahmins of the Madras presidency. He joined this party and became one of its leaders. Being an important personality in commerce and education and of an influential family in the city of Madras, he was nominated as the Councilor of Madras Corporation on February 26, 1929.<sup>1</sup> Later, he was unanimously elected as president of Madras Corporation on 2nd November 1932.<sup>2</sup> The Justice party supported him. He won the election unanimously for the first time in the history of Madras Corporation. On 8th March 1933, when the office of the president was regnated as 'Mayor' he became the Mayor of Madras Corporation. Hence, he was the last president and the first mayor of Madras Corporation.<sup>3</sup> Again he was reelected unanimously for the second term to the Mayor ship on 5th November 1934.<sup>4</sup> During his Mayorship he was instrumental in bringing the Radio station to the city.

As Mayor of the famous city of Madras, he evinced been interest to keep the city clean and wished to maintain the city as 'the city of distances and the city of Gardens' He acted as chairman of the special committee to study the problem of overcrowding in the city of Madras, and to evolve a comprehensive housing policy for the city. The Committee, under his chairmanship submitted a report, to the Council and the Council sought a financial aid to the tune of Rupees twenty lakhs from the Presidency Government to implement the Scheme. Later he constituted the city improvement trust and was associated with it for ten years. During his tenure, in the

Corporation of Madras a new suburb Thiyagaraya Nagar was planned to relieve the congestion in the city. Thus, he always worked to keep the city more beautiful with the hope of seeing the growth of the city in multiple ways. His two terms in the city corporation remained a gracious memory all his life.

During the long span of 40 years Muthiah Chettiar in various capacities as member, as chief whip and Minister served the legislature with all sincerity and seriousness. He was regular in attending assembly meeting.<sup>5</sup> He never underestimated the assembly session. He studied through the matters which were taken for discussion in the legislature. To him membership of the legislature was not a decorative adjunct to a man who had others interests in life, or just an agreeable diversion as a game of bridge or golf. Perhaps his most engaging characteristic was his willingness. On his incapacity to hurt other feelings. The greatest trait in Muthiah as a legislator was that he never shrank from responsibility. He took keen interest in the subjects and actively participated in the debates. Clarity of speech and idea was another landmark of his trait.<sup>6</sup> He spoke with zeal, explained his point clearly and convinced the member of the opposite side to his point. Even at the greatest provocation, he would seldom lose his balance. Honesty, uprightness, truth and modesty were the characteristics with Muthiah cultivated and cherished during his tenure as legislator. He was a man of principles which made him successful.<sup>7</sup> Through the belong to a particular political party his outlook was never confined to his party alone. The good of the country and the people were dearer to him than any other thing. Hence in the legislature he was always above the party politics and acted for the welfare of the people.<sup>8</sup>

Whenever Muthiah Chettiar made speeches on the floor of the legislature, he never went beyond the subject which he dwelt upon. He was of the opinion that trade and industry should be sufficiently represented in the legislature. By giving more representation to member from trade and industry. The country would be benefited by their rich experiences and knowledge. Their absence would be a handicap to the legislative council and detrimental to the interests of the country.<sup>9</sup>

Muthiah Chettiar was a great educationist. In his speech which he made in the legislature on 19th March 1932, he advocated equal educational opportunities to all communities. He opposed racial discrimination in admission. He was praised the English school for their high standard of education.<sup>10</sup> To him welfare of the country was more important than anything else. When the subject of separation of Burma came before the legislative council he valiantly spoke for the safety and security of the Indian National settled there. After seconding the amendment brought forward by T.C.Srinivasa ayyangar on the proposals for separation of Burma on 29th January 1935, Muthiah Chettiar highlighted the effect of separation on the Indian nationals there.<sup>11</sup>

The Indian who settled in Burma helped to develop Burma Indians general and Nattukkottai Nagarathar in particular had established a number of banking firms in Burma. Only these Indians were responsible for bringing into cultivation large tracts of forest land. Because of this the agricultural produced increased enormously. Further the Indian were financing the agricultural operation separation of Burma from India would be a death blow to all those operations.<sup>12</sup> So he rose head and shoulders above others and demanded to safeguard the Indians. Here, the patriotic fervor and business acumen in him, played a vital role. He categorically demanded free entry education voting right representation in legislature, safety in industry in government service, banking business and right to own property in Burma

Under the Montford Reforms of 1919, the new ministry of the Justice party, assumed office on 17th October 1920 in the Madras Presidency. The party was a ruling party in the beginning and opposition party in the council still later in 1930. Once again it captured power and B. Muniswami Naidu formed the ministry. The South Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry unanimously elected Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar to the Madras Legislative Council on 8th September 1930.<sup>13</sup> This Chamber of Commerce was electing him as legislator throughout the period of Diarchy In the legislative council, he became the Chief Whip and Chairman of justice party in 1930<sup>14</sup> and held this office till 1935. However, B. Muniswami Naidu's ministry created a great deal of discontent. It left the Telugu zamindars headed by Rajah of Bobbili to feel discomfort. Similarly there was a displeasure with leaders of Justice party belonging to the Tamil districts of the Madras Presidency. This displeasure was voiced effectively by a 'Ginger group' of Nattukkottai Chettis of the justice party.

In 1936, when Rajah of Bobbili formed the ministry, he in order to patch up factionalism within the party, inducted Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar into his ministry. When Dewan Bahadur S.Ramaswami Reddiyar resigned his

ministerial post due to his failing health, Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar was given the portfolio of Education, Medical Relief, Public and Excise.<sup>15</sup> When he was hardly thirty one years old a 'sort of younger Pitt', he was minister from October 10th 1936 to March 31st 1937 a short spell but a fruitful spell of activity. As a minister of education, by law he becomes the Pro - Chancellor of the University of Madras and other Universities of Madras Presidency. Now a rarity was accomplished in the field of education. Both father and son were Pro-Chancellors. As a minister for education, he wanted that education should be widespread, to cater to the poor and the illiterate and pleaded for increase in subsidies, When the question of trained teachers and untrained came up, he felt that by long teaching, they (the untrained) had all the training needed and defended their continuation in service. Similarly, with regard to the department of medicine when a distinction is made between the permanent medical officer of the department and honorary medical officers with regard to confidential report, he said, that as a "point of fact honorary doctors are encouraged under the system"

While he was minister for Education and Public health, he brought about many changes in the field of Education grants. The schools that maintained their standard both in quality and quantity were freely given grants and the rest were denied.<sup>16</sup> The welfare of the teacher was an important aspect in the development of education. Their welfare and happiness were given due consideration by him, this made him move so many welfare measure for the teacher. So he raised the salary from Rs. 12 per month to for a higher elementary trained teacher and Rs. 16 to 18 per month for secondary grade trained teacher.<sup>17</sup> The measure was most gratifying. The credit for bring this measure goes to Muthiah Chettiar. During his tenure of office a number of scheme were introduced.<sup>18</sup> At Karaikudi hospital was constructed with all facilities and hospital was opened on 18th November 1936.<sup>19</sup> Sanitation is a basis for the health life, aimed at the improvement of the sanitary condition. proper drainage was also given prominence a lot of money was allotted for such scheme. One such scheme was the drainage scheme for srirangam in 1936.<sup>20</sup>

Protected drinking water is utmost importance to healthy life.. Rs. 26241 for the well protected water scheme to the Coimbatore district council.<sup>21</sup> He paid keen attention towards scientific improvement in the hospitals. Number of beds and rooms were increased in hospitals. Notorious food and clothes were provided to the patients. More doctors were appointed to look after the rural population.<sup>22</sup> Muthiah chettiar was aware of the stigma attached to leprosy. He opened a number of leprosy centers throughout Madras Presidency. Of them Tharaimani leprosy centre which was opened in the premises of lady Willindon settlement was an important one to be mentioned<sup>23</sup> Rs. 25,000 was sanctioned on 4th December 1936 to eradicate leprosy.<sup>24</sup>

Again, when the private medical practice of the permanent medical officers of the government was questioned, he assured the legislature as a minister that only one officer was carrying out private practice and he too will stop it within six months. He also dealt with Municipal problems like 1. Water supply and drainage scheme, 2. More schools to meet the educational needs of the town, 3. A government high school with a girls' high school for the area and 4. A women and children hospital. He did all this sympathetically as Minister of Education and Public Health.

After the passing of the Government of India Act of 1935, elections were held, but the Congress declined the invitation of the Governor to form the Ministry under this circumstance, an interim ministry was formed by Sir K.V. Reddy by the invitation of the Governor on 1st April 1937. K.V. Reddy inducted Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar as Minister for Local Administration and Hindu Religious Endowment.<sup>25</sup> In 1937, the Nattukkottai Nagarathar Association elected him unanimously as a member of the Madras Legislative Assembly.<sup>26</sup> During his membership a bill was brought by him to reform the administration of Tirupathi temple and this bill brought the temple under Government control. When K.V Reddy was the Prime Minister of Madras Presidency. Muthiah Chettiar was nominated as member of madras Presidency. He took up the portfolio of Local self Government and Hindu religious Endowment. When he was in the chair new measure were brought about to overhaul the department of the local self government. Local self audit examiners were appointed by the government for auditing the account of Madras Corporation and here by her defalcation was discovered by the examiners and rectified.<sup>27</sup> During his period of a number of road and bridge were constructed. The Government approved to constructed a bridge karaikudi at pallathur to karunkani road.<sup>28</sup> In the district board of ramnad area, road were damaged due to flood.<sup>29</sup> The government sanctioned Rs. 15,24 for repairs of the road. Muthiah Chettiar sanctioned 2,40,402 to

the new district board, for the development of agriculture.<sup>30</sup>

As a Minister for the Hindu religious Endowments, he brought a bill to reform administration of thirupathy temple. Thirupathy devasdana bill made it possible for the government to relieve the whole income of the temple from the clutches of the davesdanam.<sup>31</sup> He brought the various income of the temple in Tamil Nadu under Government control. Hymns of devaran were recited in the temple and the recites paid by government. This was another achievement of Muthiah Chettiar.

This ministry was in office only for a short time, when the Congress made a claim and C.Rajagopalachariar formed a Congress ministry on July 14th 1937, Dr.Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar became the leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly and remained in that post from 1937<sup>32</sup> to 1939. As an opposition leader in the Assembly, he played his part in an appreciable manner. "He never opposed for opposition sake". In the debates he participated carefully with due preparation on the subject. "He was particularly good at supplementaries which, were shot off on the spur of the moment". He gave in suggestions Budget discussions, expressed his views on social justice for which his party stood. When the Government implemented prohibition, he explained the qualified support of the opposition and the attitude of 'No hurry please; wait and see policy'

Agriculture is main occupation of the people country's well being depends upon the well being of the people whose occupation was agriculture. Measure was taken to ameliorate the condition of poor peasants who were dear to him. In 1935 an amendment was brought by the revenue member. Sutter to the Loan Act of 1884.<sup>33</sup> The purpose of the amendment was to lend money to the people who had small tract of land who were suffering from debts. By the amendment it was made possible for the peasant to get sufficient loan from the government, welcome the amendment Muthiah hoped that the proposed bill helped suffering peasant. He was an able administrator. He often keen interest and actively participated in the discussion related to finance. A bill was moved to make the debtor pay not more than double the amount which he had borrow. He brought an amount for the benefit of the creditor on 29th January 1936.<sup>34</sup>

The Madras land Alimentations bill was moved by P.V.Krushnasamy choudari on 29th august 1936. Muthiah Chettiar seconded the bill and advised the government to have full statistics regarding the subject. He told that any legislation affecting the land was most dangerous anew and hold not be undertaken without careful thought. The view of the peasants must be known and enquiry should be instituted for that purpose. He was an active member of the legislative council. He was nominated member and also chairman of various committees of the legislative council such as M.S.M. Railway Committee, the madras employee protection bill select committee and borstal school act 1925 select committee. He served on the select committee to which a number of bills were referred. For some time he was the chairman of that elect committee and commendable served the same.<sup>35</sup> The government of Rajaji imposed Hindi in the schools and college compulsory subject. There was widespread opposition to this Muthiah Chettiar opposed the policy of government tooth and nail. In and out of the legislative assembly he spoke against the imposition of hindi. He interrupted the assembly meeting and raised slogan like long in Tamil down in Hindi. Because of his ceaseless effort the people realized the composition to the government spread like wild fire. Finally Rajaji had to give up the proposal. The compulsory introduction of Hindi was abolished by the Rajaji ministry on 21st feb. 1940.<sup>36</sup>

Prohibition of liqueur was also opposed by Muthiah Chettiar. Rajaji brought about prohibition as he thought that drinking was an evil habits and as true Gandhian he wanted to abolish it Muthiah Chettiar opposed the bill, but he was against drinking. More over it was quite practicable. Instead of abolishing thinking the imposition of prohibition would give unwanted and unhealthy result especially in final matters.

The Madras sale tax bill of 1939 was introduced by Raja Ministry. Muthiah chettiar opposed the bill. To him any tax collected from the merchant class was actually paid by the public. For this reason, he opposed it. Further, he pointed out that he handloom industries other small industries would get affected due to the sales tax. As a result textile industries and companies would be hit hard. It also indirectly would lead to unemployment. He warned the government not to impose this tax on the handloom industries. Muthiah Chettiar and his party lost their satisfaction lay in the fact that they invariable had their battle but they went down gamely and their support of the press and the public. Muthiah Chettiar was interested in the emancipation

of the depressed class. Temple entry was one of the step for the emancipation of depress class. When the madras temple entry bill to remove disabilities of the depressed classes was Introduced by Raja in 1939, Muthiah welcomed it and supported it whole heartedly.<sup>37</sup>

After independence Muthiah Chettiar took more concerted effort in the service of the country. In 1952, he contested from thirupathur constituency an independent candidate and was elected member of madras legislative assembly. From 1952 onwards, he had actively participated in the deliberations of the assembly.<sup>38</sup> State autonomy and langue issue were to important subjects on which he earned administration for his flawless arguments. He served in the legislative assembly. and legislative council between 1930 and 1983 and during this period he was closely associated with the Chief Minister of Tamil nadu.<sup>39</sup>

He actively participated in the discussion and voting when the following bills were brought to the assembly.

1. Madras Agriculturists Moratorium Bill September (1937)
2. Madras Agriculturists Relief bill 29th January (1938)
3. Madras Minor Port Fund August (1938)
4. Madras Electricity Duty Bill (1939)
5. Madras District Municipalities and Local Board (Amendment) Bill (1939)
6. Madras Tobacco (Taxation of Sale and Licensing) Bill (1939)
7. The Madras Sales Tax Bill, April (1939)
8. The Madras District Municipalities and Local Board amendment Bill (1939).
9. The Madras Sale of Motor Spirit Taxation Bill 20th October (1939).<sup>40</sup>

When Hindi was introduced as compulsory language of study in the schools and colleges in 1938, he opposed it and explained that they have no objection to Hindi being made an optional subject, instead of a compulsory subject, and this opposition is genuine and not born out of party faction. When the demand on soil was discussed, he protested, what was wrong in saying "Long Live Tamil" and "Down with Hindi" during picketing and said in clear terms that Mr. Ramaswami Naicker's detention in Bellary Jail is not proper and demanded his release. He said. "I am not voicing my own individual opinion. In my objection to the compulsory introduction of Hindi I am dealing with the question only in a humanitarian spirit".<sup>41</sup>

When on the removal of disabilities among certain classes of Hindus Mr.M.C. Rajah's motion on acceptance of the select committee's report (1938) was debated, Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar was generally ahead of the times. His party, he affirmed, had always worked for the uplift of the depressed classes. "He was confident that the bill will go a long way and educate our brother about temple entry". "I congratulate the premier and the government on having accepted the bill. The good wishes of the house will be a guarantee of the success of the measure in the country".<sup>42</sup>

When his father was toiling and moving heaven and earth for the sake of the Indian merchants in Burma, on the floor of the legislature, Dr.Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar participated in debates on the happenings in Burma. He pleaded that the provincial government and the Indian government must come forward to protect the people of Indian origin in countries like Burma, Malaya, Ceylon and he suggested sending a delegation to help the Indians in those countries. He demanded that the government must get in touch with the government of the above countries. He brought to the notice of the government the loss of property of Indian petty merchants in Burma etc. Again in 1954 when the plight of Indian nationals in Ceylon was discussed in the Assembly, he said, "the question of treatment of Indian nationals abroad has been engaging the attention of the government of India and this house for a long time. It is not as if this is the first instance where in this house we are discussing the question of treatment of Indian nationals abroad"<sup>43</sup> and explained the drawback in the role of the Government of India and State Government. He demanded the reopening of the emigration department and the attention of the Prime Minister of India to take-up the matter for the redressed of the grievances of Indians in Ceylon.

He was nominated to the Indian Constituent Assembly as a member from 1946 to 1950.<sup>44</sup> He participated in the debates of the Assembly. He also gave his opinion in the Madras legislative assembly debates on the following bills:

- + The Madras city municipal second amendment bill 13th February (1947)

- + General discussion of budget 5th March (1947)
- + Land revenue 5th March (1947)
- + Voting on demands for grants 8th March (1947)
- + Demand on education 29th March (1947)
- + The Madras Hindu Bigamous Marriage prohibition and divorce bill April 23rd (1947)
- + General discussion of the budget (1948)
- + Position of Indians in Burma 28th February (1948)
- + General discussion of the budget 28th February (1948)
- + The Madras Village Panchayats Bill 12th January (1950)
- + The budget memorandum for labour including factories and Harijan uplift (1950)
- + Delimitation of constituencies and conduct of elections to legislatures 9th August (1950)
- + Food situation in the state 10th August (1950)
- + Study of languages in secondary schools 12th August (1950).
- + The Madras City Improvement trust Bill 2nd September (1950),
- + The Madras Hindu Religious and Endowment charitable Bill 11th September (1950).
- + The Madras Irrigation (Betterment, contribution and inclusion fees) Bill (1951)
- + The Madras Appropriation Bill March (1952)<sup>45</sup>
- + Andhra State Bill 20th July.

After Independence of India, he was elected from Tirupattur Constituency as Congress candidate in 1952 to the Madras Legislative Assembly<sup>46</sup> and again re-elected in 1957 from Karaikkudi Constituency. During this period he actively participated in the following debates where his views and opinions always won the appreciation of the legislators. They were (i) Indian National abroad in Ceylon May 13th (1954), (ii) Budget discussion March 3rd (1955) (iii) state reorganization November 21st 1950. Later from 1963 to December 1983, he was a nominated member of Madras Legislative Council<sup>47</sup> (Upper House of the State Legislature).

Although his career as a legislator had ended "he fitted into the environment, moved easily and in the friendliest way, with his fellow – legislators. Wealth and social status did not go to his head. He was a gentleman every inch of him and his gentlemanliness was not just conformity with current social codes. He got on excellently with those he had to deal with. His rich experience of men and affairs, ability to see the other man's point of view and reach agreed decisions made him a valuable asset in the legislative field. Muthiah Chettiar took his legislative responsibilities seriously. He was assiduous, studied the questions before the legislature in detail, strove to understand conflicting points of view and expressed his conclusion with a forthrightness which gained rather than lost by the scrupulously temperate way in which he expressed his views. He was particularly good at supplementaries which, shot off on the spur of the moment, helped to focus attention on the heart of a problem. Perhaps Muthiah Chettiar's most engaging characteristic was his unwillingness or his incapacity to hurt anybody's feelings. He was one of the most urbane of men and the soft answer which precluded wrath came to him naturally. While he readily appreciated and lent his support to a measure which he was satisfied was in the public interest, he was not mean to condemn what he thought was hasty or ill conceived. He never lost touch with realities but displayed always foresight and a clear appreciation of the facts of life. He did not mince his words; at the same time he was courteous and fair.

That explains why he was rated highly by persons as differently constituted, as say the Rajah of Panagal, Rajagopalachariar, Basheer Ahmed Sayeed, Abdul Hamid Khan, Sir A.T. Pannirselvam and Sir Mohamed Usman. His utterances in the legislature were well reasoned and moderate in tone. C.Rajagopalachariar, not by any means an easy man to please, had the highest regard for him and gave expression to it not only in private but also on the floor of the house. Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer once said at a public meeting by using Kalidasa's phrase, satyaya mitabhashi, moderate in speech in the interests of truth.<sup>48</sup>

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